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BIHAR YOGA®

SWAN Meditation

Theory and Practice

Swami Satyadharma



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

SWAN Meditation



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Theory and Practice

Swami Satyadharma

*Compiled from discourses and practices given
during her teaching tour of Japan, May 2012*



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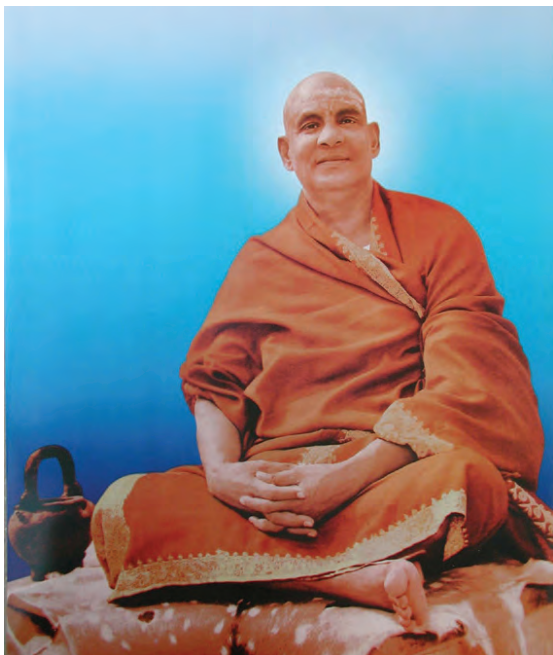
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

*Dedicated to Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati,
the Great Swan, who first gave us these teachings,
and whose wisdom and inspiration are the light of the world.*



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Introduction

The swan has spiritual associations, partly due to its beauty, partly due to the qualities it has that we would like to develop in ourselves. It can walk on the earth, swim and dive in water, and fly through the sky. Humans can only walk on the earth, so it is more versatile than we are.

Discrimination

The swan has another important ability, according to the vedic texts: it can filter milk from water. This exemplifies the quality of discrimination. Discrimination means to understand the difference between one quality and another, between permanent and impermanent, practical and impractical, something that helps and something that hinders. A yogi should have that ability. In the SWAN practices:

S relates to Strength

W to Weakness

A to Ambition or Aim

N to Needs

To understand and to discriminate among your strengths, weaknesses, aims and needs: this is empowerment. Normally we don't even think about these qualities, yet at every moment they are active in our lives and they dictate who we are. If we don't understand ourselves and our lives in relation to these qualities, then what is the quality of our

lives? They're very close to the lives of animals, although we think humans are so special. What is so special about us if we don't understand the quality of our lives? That is discrimination.

Self-knowledge

Our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs form our personalities. Even after all our education, we still don't know ourselves. Each of us is different. In yoga, it is important for us to do asana and pranayama not only to get to know our bodies better, but also to understand our personalities. If we don't understand our personalities, we can behave oddly, say inappropriate things or perform unsuitable actions. We never know what we will say, what we will feel or how we will behave. We don't know ourselves, so how can we know what we are going to say or how we will behave with someone? We know ourselves externally, but we don't know the ways we are weak or strong or what our personalities mean. We just go through life automatically.

Therefore, the SWAN practices are important for helping us to understand ourselves by looking at these four qualities: our strengths, our weaknesses, our aims or ambitions, and our needs. These qualities determine our behaviour, habits, actions and interactions. This understanding is the key to improving our lives.

Self-acceptance

Yoga also speaks about self-acceptance. We need to accept ourselves before we can improve ourselves; however, we need to know ourselves before we can accept ourselves. The SWAN practice makes this possible since by examining strengths, weaknesses, aims and needs, we get a picture of ourselves – not as we imagine ourselves to be, but as we are. We have to start where we are. This idea of knowing ourselves, accepting ourselves, as we are, where we are, is the basis of yoga. Understanding ourselves gives us stability and makes our lives more useful to us.

1

Strengths

The SWAN's first aspect is strength. For many of us, this is our biggest unknown. Our strengths are the positive qualities that actually get us through life. Very often we don't recognize them; we even mistake them for weaknesses. The qualities that promote our wellbeing and help us develop in life may be qualities or abilities that we are born with. Let's start with something familiar: our physical bodies.

Physical strengths

- *Good health:* This is the most important physical strength.
- *Flexibility:* In yoga, we gain flexibility and improve our health. Without flexibility, we are weak.
- *Adaptability:* The body can adapt to heat, cold, and hard work.
- *Muscular strength:* This defines the physical tasks we can undertake.
- *Beauty:* Many beautiful people can do a lot with beauty alone. They can walk into places and the door will be opened for them. Beauty is a strength one is born with, although one can also learn how to enhance it.
- *Energy:* You need to know how much you have and why it varies from day to day.
- *Endurance:* If the body does not get food, it can manage for some time. If it does not get water, it can manage for

some time. If you walk a long way, you can manage. That's endurance.

- *Balance and coordination*: Various physical activities depend on how balanced and coordinated your body is, dance and gymnastics, for instance.
- *The ability of the body to perform whatever is required*: If you have to get up and dance, you can dance. If you have to lie down and do yoga nidra, you can lie down and do yoga nidra.
- The ability to *eat well*
- The ability to *sleep well*
- The ability to *heal from injury*
- *Regular bowel movements*
- *Good eyesight*
- Optimum function of all body systems.

Emotional strengths

- *Optimism*: This means to see the best and search for the best in every thing and in everybody: at work, at home, in the family, in our kids. Not everybody is optimistic, but we can develop that quality. We can practise optimism, just like practising asana or kirtan. That was my guru's main teaching: become optimistic, see the best in everybody, feel the best about everything after it's done, because you are what you feel. If you feel the best, you are the best! If you feel the worst, you are the worst.
- *Kindness*: When you are optimistic and positive, it is easy to become kind. Kindness to oneself, kindness to one's family, kindness to the outside world, is a divine quality. God is kind, and we need to become kind also. If we can be kind, then life will become kind to us.
- *Compassion*: The Buddha talked about it, "Become compassionate." Compassion means to feel the suffering of another or even myself. To feel and understand the suffering of a child, the suffering of another person, the suffering of a dog, or the suffering of a tree; that is compassion.

- *Faith*: Our modern society has lost faith. We have faith in technology. We have faith in our modern amenities, yet we have forgotten about the higher reality; we think only about technology and the comforts of life. Technology and amenities can't help us emotionally, they won't get us through. Faith will get us through; faith in a higher reality, a reality bigger than any one of us and bigger than technology. We have to find that faith. I am not talking about religion. I am talking of reality, consciousness. There is a cosmic reality to connect with and it requires faith.
- *Respect*: Respect is a feeling, and when you generate that within yourself, you open yourself to so much more. When you give respect, wherever you give respect, things open up to you, they unfold for you, and good things are returned to you.
- *Love*: We're a little weak at this. We love ourselves, love our money, and love our things. Still, we are often unable to maintain that love within us as a quality, to feel that love within ourselves which makes everything good. We need to work on loving more: loving our family, loving our friends, loving our place, wherever we are. We need to love. Love makes us strong. What is God? God is love. If we don't know love, we will never know God. In any language, any concept, God is always love.
- *Being considerate*: To consider others, how they may be feeling, why they may be speaking or acting a certain way, to be caring about others' children as well as our own; this is consideration. Be caring of all: animals, trees and plants, everything.
- *Security*: The feeling of security within oneself, within one's family, within one's home, with one's work.
- *Confidence*: To be confident in the relationship with our partner, confident in our role as a mother or a father, confident in our work, makes us strong.
- *Being charitable*: To be able to give to another person in need.

- *Happiness*: We think some people are happy purely by luck, but we can all become happy. Who is happy and who is not happy is not a random thing. It is a quality, and we need this quality. People who are happy are strong emotionally.
- *Contentment*: To be content with what I have, knowing that whatever I have is enough; this is a strength.
- *Emotional balance*
- *Being quick to laugh and cry*
- *Accepting others*
- *Simplicity*
- *Gratitude*
- *Forgiveness*
- *Sympathy*.

Mental strengths

- *Mental balance*: Perhaps none of us are very good at this. Sometimes we feel mentally good, sometimes mentally not so good.
- *Awareness*: Without yoga, we just move around normally, we never develop awareness of where we are, what we are doing, what we are saying; with yoga we become more aware in life.
- *Attention*: Children need to be attentive at school to learn, and we need to be attentive in our lives so we can be successful.
- *Mental clarity*: If your mind is clear, you can think clearly, you can make correct decisions, you can remember things.
- *Good mental focus*: Being able to apply your mind positively, to think positively, not negatively.
- *Intelligence*: Some people are very intelligent, some people are not so intelligent and they have to try harder.
- *Knowledge*: Knowledge that you gain through study and through life is a strength.
- *Discrimination*: The ability to tell the difference and choose the right course of action.
- *Understanding*: Some people are very understanding, for example, grandparents are generally more understanding than parents.

- *Determination*: Determination means never giving up; finding a way through.
- *Analyzing*: The ability to research, to analyze, to rationalize, to think through concepts.
- The ability to *remember quickly*
- *Persistence*
- *Inspiration*
- *Willpower*
- *Imagination*
- *Creativity*.

Psychic strengths

The psychic level is one we don't know much about. Your psyche is the mind behind your mind, the consciousness behind your mind. When you go to sleep at night, where do you go? It is a different mind, but there is still a lot of activity there.

Sometimes even in the day we dream, we daydream. That's the psychic level. When we are thinking, speaking or aware, we are interacting using our minds. Behind the mind there is this bigger mind, a bigger consciousness. That is our psychic nature. Our psychic nature holds all the memories and associations that are responsible for who we are. They make us a woodcutter or housewife or cake-maker or lover of pets. Through yogic practices, through yoga nidra, through mantras and kirtan, we become aware of the psychic level slowly, in a balanced way. We become a bigger person and a more capable person, but only if we develop the awareness of the psychic level in a gradual, balanced way.

- *Intuition*: When we develop awareness at the psychic level, we can experience intuition. What is intuition? It is when you know something suddenly. Your daughter may be living somewhere else in the world, and she may not be able to talk to you, but suddenly you know she is sick. How do you know that? Nobody told you, there was no telephone call, but you know. That's psychic. You can develop that through yoga and through meditation.

Meditation should develop that quality of knowledge, which is inner, higher knowledge, another kind of mental knowledge.

- *Creativity*: When you develop your awareness at the psychic level, you can become very creative. You can see things from inside yourself. An artist has to have that. Art that comes from looking outside, landscapes or portraits, that's okay, but a real artist finds seas inside and paints them. A real musician hears music inside and when that music is played, it is extraordinary, not ordinary. That's a great musician. That's creative. That's art.
- *Inner vision*: A saint sees God; a saint hears the voice of God. How? That's inner vision. Inner vision is a reality for people who have developed that level of mind and consciousness.
- *Dreams*: Some people have beautiful dreams. They dream of the guru, the master, God and angels. That is a great strength.

We don't all have every one of the above qualities, but we may have a few and we need to identify those. That will help us. That's the beginning of knowing our strengths. So let's practise the SWAN meditation, starting with our strengths.

Practice: SWAN meditation – strengths

Sit quietly in a comfortable meditation posture. Now close your eyes, allow the body to relax. Become aware of your whole physical body. Become aware of the position of the body. Begin to feel the body from head to toe. Feel the body becoming quiet and still. Maintain total awareness of the body, which is physical in nature, and feel your energy, your mind, your soul in the body. Become aware of the quality of your body, whatever it may be.

Look for the positive strengths of your body. You don't have to think about weaknesses or negative points, just the positive ones. If negative thoughts about the body come into your mind, let them go, then bring up positive ones. Try to search out and identify all the positive qualities of your body.

Count on your fingers at least five physical strengths that you have.

Think about five physical strengths that you wish to develop. Choose strengths that are possible for you to develop.

Now leave the physical body and become aware of feeling and emotion. Become aware of the feeling within you at this time. Become aware of different feelings that are strong in you, your positive feelings. Count five of them on your fingers.

Count five strengths that you have emotionally. Five emotional strengths that support you and help you through difficulties.

Now leave the emotional level. Become aware of the state of mind that you are experiencing at this moment. Become aware of five mental strengths you have. Count them on your fingers.

Become aware of two, three, four or five more that you want to develop.

Now leave the mental region and become aware of the psyche. Reflect on your dreams, daydreams; meditation, the quality of your meditation, your experience during yoga nidra, your ability to connect with your deeper mind: memories that arise, ideas that arise, creativity.

Now leave the four levels of strengths. Just sit quietly. Look into the space in front of the closed eyes without thinking about any particular strength. What is the one strength that comes into your mind? If nothing comes, let it be, but see if one quality comes into your mind. It is your best strength. If it doesn't come to you now, it will come to you. When it comes, you will know.

Now leave aside that thought also. Look into the space in front of the closed eyes. See a small, steady, brightly burning candle flame. Keeping this vision, chant the mantra *Om* three times.

Now slowly come back into the room, into the physical body. Move your fingers, stretch the body, release the posture and open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Ultimately, through the practices of SWAN meditation, a stage of integration is reached wherein the different levels of the personality: instinctive, emotional, mental and psychic, are able to function and coordinate harmoniously. The fragmented aspects of the human personality, which hinder and limit creative potential, are gradually unified and reinforced, creating more positive channels of expression.

—Swami Niranjanananda

2

Weaknesses

How do we know that something is a weakness? It limits us, it blocks us, keeps us from progressing and from achieving our goals. Weaknesses are those tendencies that block our wellbeing, our development and our evolution. They are also our disabilities, and we need to look at them clearly.

Physical weaknesses

- *Poor health*
- *Being overweight*
- *Being underweight*
- *Lack of strength*
- *Lack of physical adaptability*
- *Lack of endurance*
- *Stiffness*
- *Blindness*
- *Deafness*
- *High blood pressure*
- *Poor bone construction*
- *Headaches*
- *Ageing*
- *Chemical sensitivity*
- *Allergies*
- *Any other physical debility.*

Emotional weaknesses

- *Emotional imbalance*: Sometimes we are happy, sometimes sad. Life always has its ups and downs.
- *Sensitivity*: Some people are too sensitive, others are insensitive.
- *Attachment and dependence*: We are attached and dependent on our partner, our children and our parents.
- *Inability to adapt to changing circumstances*
- *Inability to manage stress*
- *Constant worry, fear and anxiety*
- *Insecurity*
- *Impatience*
- *Jealousy*
- *Aggression*
- *Anger*
- *Pessimism*
- *Panic*
- *Depression*
- *Apathy*
- *Lack of faith*
- *Lack of respect*
- *Lack of motivation*
- *Low self-esteem.*

Mental weaknesses

- *Negativity*: Negative thinking, criticizing all the time.
- *Neurosis*: Always thinking, thinking, thinking about the same thing; the same thoughts, the same fears and anxieties repeated over and over.
- *Dullness*: The mind cannot think clearly.
- *Restless mind*: Always moving from one thing to another.
- *Scepticism*
- *Inhibition*
- *Lack of awareness*
- *Misunderstanding*
- *Confusion*

- *Poor memory or memory loss*
- *Dissipation.*

Psychic weaknesses

- *Confusion about inner and outer reality:* You think that the inner psychic reality is the outer reality.
- *Paranoia:* People feel fear inside and project that fear outside.
- *Poor insight:* To look inside is one thing, to look outside is another thing. We normally look outside, but psychic people look inside for the answers. A psychic weakness is a lack of the ability to look inside.
- *Lack of foresight:* Psychic people have an idea about what's to come; lacking that ability is a weakness.
- *Poor imagination*
- *Poor creativity.*

Using strengths to overcome weaknesses

Now we know a little about our strengths and our weaknesses. Often our weaknesses overshadow our strengths, however, because we identify with the weaknesses, not with the strengths. That's why we forget to use and develop our strengths. At the same time, we try to hide our weaknesses, although what we should do is support our weaknesses with our strengths.

Practice: List your strengths and weaknesses

Make two lists, one of your strengths, one of your weaknesses, in physical, emotional and mental categories. Then try to find the strength that you can use to support a particular weakness. In this way we can gradually overcome our weaknesses.

When strengths become weaknesses

Sometimes our strengths become weaknesses also. For example, a person who is very strong physically can do harm to themselves or to others. Sometimes a very beautiful woman

or man relies too much on their beauty and doesn't develop other qualities, so it becomes a weakness in the end. Determination is a good quality, yet sometimes a very determined person becomes stubborn. Therefore, we really need to examine our strengths and how we use them.

Vital self-knowledge

What we can or cannot do in life is decided by our strengths and weaknesses and if we are to know ourselves, if we are to understand our personalities, it's very important to consider these. It is only when we understand our strengths and our weaknesses that we can take responsibility for ourselves in life.

Understanding our strengths and weaknesses is not a five-minute study; it is a lifetime study. There are very few people who have this knowledge about themselves. Psychologists and psychiatrists may have a lot of information in books; however, what I am talking about is real, useful knowledge because it is about you; it is about your life, your strengths and weaknesses. A therapist cannot know you as you can know you; only you can know.

Practice: SWAN meditation – weaknesses

Now we are going to practice the meditation in which we look at our weaknesses. Please come into a comfortable meditation position, placing the hands in the meditation mudra of your choice. Close the eyes gently, bring your awareness inside. Become aware of your physical body. Become aware of the whole physical body from the top of the head, down to the toes. Feel the body sitting quietly and comfortably. Allow the whole body to relax. Focus on the body and relaxation. Become aware of the natural breath. Watch each breath as you breathe in and out. Follow the flow of each breath with your awareness.

As you watch the breath, just allow the idea of physical weakness to come into the mind. Side by side with the

breath, become aware of any physical weakness that you may have. Just name it; you don't have to think a long time about it; just recognize this one, this one, this one. Try to recognize as many physical weaknesses as you can and name them one by one.

Become aware of the breath at the nose tip. Leave the physical weaknesses. Just follow the breath; be aware of the body and the breath. As you watch the breath, become aware of emotional weaknesses. Try to name a few that relate to your life. Go on with the breath side by side, emotional weaknesses and the breath.

Now, ease the emotional weaknesses, be aware of the breath. Become aware of the mental weaknesses. Which mental weakness do you feel in your life? Be aware of the breath side by side. See if you can name a few mental weaknesses that affect you in your life. Be aware of the breath, following each breath. Now, leave the mental weaknesses also. Just be aware of the body and the breath.

As you follow the breath, be aware of any psychic weakness, if you can relate to that level. Keep your awareness with the breath and if you relate to any psychic weakness, just name it.

Leave the weaknesses, and gaze into the space in front of the closed eyes. Gaze with the relaxed, free mind. Simultaneously, be aware of the natural breath. Just look in a relaxed way into the space. That's all. Just see if any weakness comes into the mind, whatever comes without trying to think of anything.

Whatever comes, recognize that. Just see it and then let it go. Be aware of the breath, gazing into the space. Within the space, in front of the closed eyes, begin to see a small, steady, brightly burning candle flame. Gazing at the flame, chant the mantra *Om* three times.

Now come back to the room in which you are sitting. Become aware of the physical body. Become aware of the effect of the practice. Try to remember what you

discovered during the practice about yourself, and remember the earlier practice to define your strengths. See how the strengths and weaknesses have become part of your life and how, by understanding them, you can change your life if you wish. Now slowly open the eyes and release the position.

Hari Om Tat Sat

The practice of SWAN unfolds a new vision of oneself and of one's life, an experience of internal unity and self-acceptance, which is not affected by external changes and influences.

—Swami Niranjanananda

3

Aims

After we have understood our strengths and weaknesses, we need to understand how to apply them. There are many people who have no idea of any aim or goal or purpose. They live life day-to-day. Those people generally do not go very far in life. In order to succeed in life, to achieve something, we need a goal, we need a purpose, we need an aim. We should aim to achieve something and be something for ourselves, and we should also aim to do something and be something for the people around us, for society, for humanity. An aim in life gives us a direction, a reason to live. Our aims and ambitions are what decide our motivations, our aspirations and our actions.

Most people are aimless

Many people do not have an aim in life. When I first went to my guru, I was a young woman in my twenties. When my guru asked, “What is your purpose in life?” I just said, “I don’t know.” I had never thought about it! He said, “You can’t live a life without a purpose. A purposeless life is not worth living.” And he said, “You must ask yourself from today, what is your purpose in life? Why are you living? Otherwise, why should you live at all? Waste of food.”

Choosing realistic aims

Our aims can be understood and guided by our strengths and our weaknesses. You need to know your strengths and

weaknesses to understand if your aim is correct or not. Can I do that? With my assets and deficits, is it possible for me? Yes? Great. No? Find something else.

If I'm a poor man without much education who doesn't know much about politics, it's no use for me to aim to become the president of a country or even the head of a town. What I can do is choose something that I would be able to do well, aim for and achieve that. Thus, our aims should be practical.

Many people have the idea that it is a bad thing to be ambitious. My guru said that ambition is absolutely necessary in life, even for a monk. It is ambition that will help us to achieve something in life; however, our ambition should be directed towards positive and attainable goals.

Ambition and aim are what we wish to do and be. Every one of us is born with a potential to do and to be something, thus the next step in life is to discover that aim and keep moving towards it.

Two types of aims: external and internal

External aims: Up until now, we have been aware mostly of external aims. Physically we have aims: a boy may wish to build up his muscles. That's an aim. A girl might wish to be slim and beautiful. That's an aim. With that aim you can see boys and girls jogging, going to the gym, joining in physical fitness activities, aerobics and yoga. Young people may aim to have a family one day. In order to have a family, they have to work. They need a job, a car, a house, a bank account. We may aim to pursue a particular profession. We require education and experience so we acquire those, then we can pursue the profession. It didn't just happen. We worked a long time to get into that company, into that position or own that shop, be a good housewife or become a mother.

Similarly, we have friends, we have status in society. We want to be a good member of society, maybe even a leader in society. We want to have good friends in society; we work for that.

We have aims relating to family, profession, finances. We may have an aim to achieve financial stability. That's

important; we need to know that it's our aim to live like that. Some of us aim to attain name and fame in our profession; we want to attain some status, some recognition: maybe as a dancer, maybe as a yoga teacher, maybe as a business manager or shop owner.

We may be more familiar with the aim when it is something we're interested in, or something we think we might like to do or be, yet we are not really clear on them. We need to clarify these and sort them into priorities.

Internal aims: We also have internal aims. These can be more difficult to attain because they are not material, physical attainments. For example: I would like to be a happy person, I would like to be a kind person, I would like to be a person who helps others, I would like to be a creative person or I would like to be a hard-working person because I'm lazy.

People have mental aims, for example, 'I would like to have a better memory.' Someone might aim to have mental clarity. Somebody may wish to have strong willpower. Somebody might wish to have more faith, experience of a higher life, an inner life.

In our lives, we should try to balance the two types, the external aims and the internal aims.

Practice: Identifying aims

Step 1: Write down your aims

Sit down with a pen and a paper and figure out your aims in life: externally, internally, physically, professionally, financially, family-related, all of them. What do I wish to achieve? What do I wish to be at the end of the day?

There are some important points to consider in relation to understanding your aims:

- To succeed, your aims need to be realistic, practical and achievable. Consider your assets and your deficits, your strengths and your weaknesses. Your aims should be achievable.
- You should also consider whether your ambitions are positive or negative. Drop the negative ones.

- Don't have too many aims. You need to prioritize your aims.

Step 2: Prioritize your aims

Take the list of all the aims you wish to achieve and sort them by priority. Focus only on the first three; you cannot do everything. When you try to do too many things, you achieve nothing. You have to go deeply into one aim to achieve.

There is a story in India about a man who wanted to find water on his property. He started to dig a well in one place. He dug down ten feet and he didn't see water. He left that place, went to another place, dug down again twelve or fifteen feet and didn't see water. He left that place, went to a third place. He again started to dig, dig. He must have dug holes in twenty different places. He never came to water. One day a water diviner came onto his property. He asked, "What were you doing digging all these wells? The water was there in the first well you dug, but you didn't dig deep enough!"

Don't we do the same thing? We have to choose one, two or three aims and work on those. Don't waste time working on too many things. Don't waste time working on things you can't attain or that aren't going to have positive outcomes. This step requires some contemplation.

Practice: SWAN meditation – aims

Please sit comfortably in a meditation position, and place your hands in the meditation mudra of your choice. Make sure your head, neck, shoulders and spine are straight and in alignment.

Bring your awareness to the body. Become aware of your whole physical body from the top of your head, right down to the toes. Feel the position you are sitting in, and feel the condition of the body in this position. Focus your entire awareness on the body. Feel that the body is settling into the position. Feel comfortable in the position. Allow the entire body to relax in the position. Be aware

of relaxation and comfort. As you focus on the body, feel the whole body becoming more and more relaxed; totally relaxed and at ease within yourself. Go on focusing on the relaxed body and feel the body posture becoming steady and relaxed. Feel the body becoming totally still. Focus on the steadiness and the stillness of the body. Feel the whole body becoming absolutely steady, like a rock.

Within the body, become aware of the breath. Feel that the body breathes in and the body breathes out, and you are watching the body and the breath. Begin to follow the movement of each breath with your whole awareness. Become aware of the incoming breath and the outgoing breath. Feel that the awareness is fixed to the breath. As the breath flows the awareness also flows in and out. You follow each breath in turn, from beginning to middle to end.

Now, side by side with the breath, begin to gaze at the space in front of the closed eyes, and also feel comfortable in this space, gazing into the space, which is your inner space, your inner existence. Be aware of the breath and gazing into the space. Without making mental effort, become aware of your aim in life. Just like that. What is your aim in life? If it does not come into your mind, then become aware of what you want to attain in your life. It may be physical, social or internal. Allow this aim to become clear in your mind. Feel that this aim is right for you, and you can attain it.

Begin to search for the strengths that you have, your inner strengths, your outer strengths, those that will help you to attain this aim. Try to name the strengths that will help you to attain this particular aim. Even if you can only find one or two, that is good. Keep them in mind. Breathe side by side with the aims, using the support of the breath.

Begin to search internally to identify the weaknesses that prevent you from attaining this aim. Don't try too hard; let them come. Your mind knows them. Let them come and place them on the other side of the aim. Now, you have the aim in the middle, on the right side you

have strengths to help you achieve it and on the left, the weaknesses that obstruct you.

Now, do another search for a strength that will support each weakness that is obstructing you. And don't try. Let it come. It will come. Keep the idea in your mind, the aim, the strengths to attain it, the weaknesses that block it, and then which strengths you can use to support those weaknesses so that they will not block it. Keep the concept in your mind clearly, but without too much effort. Just see it in the space in front of your closed eyes.

You now have the aim in the middle, you have the strengths on the right, and the weaknesses on the left, and alongside the weaknesses you have some strengths that will help to support you.

The next thing to do is determine what you need to attain this aim. Relax. Let your mind do the work. You're just seeing. Be aware of the breath. See if you can identify one or two or three needs that will help you to attain this aim. These needs should be in relation to the aim only, not other aspects of life. Relax. Be aware of the breath. Breathing in, breathing out. Use the breath to support this contemplation.

Be aware of the breath in, the breath out. Look again. You have your aim in the middle. See it. See it, already attained. You already are that aim. On the right, see the strengths that will help you attain it, help you to be it. On the left side of the aim, see the weaknesses that prevent you from attaining it. See one or two strengths to support each weakness so they won't block you any more. Now underneath, supporting the whole concept, see what you need physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, professionally, or in any other way to attain the aim. What do you need to attain it? Be aware of the breath; use the breath to support your contemplation on it.

This is your inner swan. Allow the whole concept to change into a beautiful swan. See a beautiful white swan in your inner space. Now allow this image of the swan to

fade into the space. Go on looking into the empty space and see a small, steady, brightly burning candle flame. Hold this image of the flame while you chant the mantra *Om* three times.

Sit quietly with your eyes closed for a few moments. Become aware of the effects of the meditation you have just completed. Try to remember each stage and process of the meditation, the creation of your inner swan. Please become aware of your physical body sitting in the room. Slowly move your fingers. Move your toes. Slowly bend your head forward, back, move it from side to side and then gradually release your asana. Open your eyes. Now you have your own swan. If you use and develop it within, you become a special person, you will have something that nobody else has: integration within the different levels of your personality, which are able to function and coordinate harmoniously. It's up to you. Sometimes we receive wonderful gifts, although we never use them. This is a gift to you from our master. He gives it to you with love and with all the best wishes for you in your life; however, he also says it is up to you now to use the gift of the swan.

Hari Om Tat Sat



4

Needs

We come now to the fourth component of the SWAN theory. We have our strengths, we have our weaknesses, and we have our aims. There is one more point we need to consider: our needs.

Discriminating between needs and desires

What do we really need? We are confused. The modern-day media tells us constantly, “You need this, you want that, you enjoy this, you must buy that, you must have this, your child must have that, your spouse must have this . . .” What should we buy? What do we want? What do we need? We don’t know any more. Our houses are overflowing with things we don’t need. Our good money and hard work is wasted. This can be avoided. Remember that the swan has the quality of discrimination. Develop discrimination before you acquire something else you don’t need. Needs are different from ambitions and aims, although sometimes we mix them up.

We see that our friend or neighbour has a nice, shiny new car and we think, ‘Oh, I need a car, too!’ Actually I have a car. It works all right. It drives me everywhere I need to go. Still, now that I’ve seen that shiny new car, I can’t get it out of my mind. It may be a new dress or a new flat. We need to place that car or flat or dress in another category. It is not a need; it is a desire. We have to be clear about it in our mind. Okay, I may have many desires, too. If I decide that I want to attain my desire, that shiny new car, I will make it one of my ambitions.

Or maybe I'll decide, "No, I really don't need it," so I scrap the desire and I don't have to go through all the work to achieve it.

Desires may become ambitions. We have to take control of this because this is happening in life, all around us. All of our friends are like this. They don't understand why, immediately after they see something, they think, 'I need it. I have to have it, too.' That's how this whole materialistic, consumer society runs. We have to understand what we actually do need.

Simplify

We do not need as much as we think we do or as much as the media is telling us we need. One important quality we learn from yoga is simplicity. The fewer needs we have, the more simple life becomes. The more we need, the more complicated it becomes. This is a yogic view. Let us look at the basic types of needs to clarify the difference between needs, desires, and ambitions.

Physical needs

- *Food*: If we don't have it, we'll die. If we have too much food, we'll die, too! Therefore, the need is for the right amount of food and also the right type of food for each individual. If one person cuts wood in a forest, the right amount and type of food is needed for that individual. If another person sits in an office all day, a different amount and type of food is needed for that person. A person who has chemical sensitivity needs another type of food. For everything we think we need, we have to qualify what exactly is the need. Food is needed; however, maybe delicious, rich restaurant food will make us sick. If we don't work out which food we need, we may get sick until we do find out.
- *Shelter*: We need to sleep safely, out of the wind and the rain and the snow and the heat. However, see all the complications that have arisen as basic needs are met and desires increase. Many people have such enormous places, big apartment buildings going up into the sky. Let this need be practical. I don't need to spend my whole life

attaining a big, big house, living at the top of a skyscraper. What do I really need as shelter for myself, for my family? For each one of us, this is different.

- *Clothing*: We need to cover the naked body. That's all clothing is for: to protect our bodies from cold, rain and other extreme elements, yet look what we have made out of that. There are so many new clothes available every year in every price range. What is the clothing that we really need and what is the clothing we desire? What is the clothing that we aim to attain? It's such a small thing and yet it is all blown out of proportion in our lives.
- *Security*: We all need to feel secure; our family should be secure. We have locks and all kinds of systems in place for security.
- *Comfort*: We need some elemental comforts in life. Again, we have gone overboard and focused on nothing but comfort and forgotten what the needs were. Too much comfort makes us weak.
- *Exercise*: If we don't exercise, we will become weak. But some people exercise too much, some people not at all. Which type of exercise will help our overall wellbeing? Everybody's needs are different.
- *Medicine*: We need it, nevertheless, we've overdone it. We take medicine for every condition that we get; we need to examine that, too, as we may not really need all that we are taking.

Emotional needs

- *Relationships*
- *Love*
- *Support*
- *Ideals*
- *Faith*.

Mental needs

- *Satisfaction*
- *Purpose*

- *Stimulation*
- *Peace.*

Psychic needs

- *Inner experience*
- *Inner purification*
- *Union with the divine.*

We also have needs that relate to our society, our family, our community. We have needs for education and our children's education. We need certain qualifications. We need to have a profession. We need a certain amount of money to live. We need a phone. We need transportation. In all these areas, we have to find a balance between too much and too little, and find out exactly what we do need. Surprisingly, when you do that, you'll find that you have extra money and extra time too, so you can practise more yoga.

Practice: Make a list of your needs

What do you really need? Make a list. Then look at the possessions you have that you need and don't need. What do you want that you need and don't need?

Different needs for different life stages

One more thing I would like to point out about needs is that we have different needs at different stages of our lives.

Birth to twenty-five: A young person, from birth to twenty-five years old, has a certain set of needs for their growth and for their education.

Twenty-five to fifty: The person between twenty-five and fifty has needs in relation to family life. The needs of a student are very different from the needs of a family person.

Fifty to seventy-five: The next stage is from age fifty to seventy-five, when your life is no longer dominated by the needs of the family. You need to start developing a concept of your own inner needs, what you need to fulfil yourself as a person. From fifty to seventy-five, we need to begin to

discover ourselves; our inner lives become important, our inner qualities. Before that, it was our outer life that was important: society, a profession and the family.

After seventy-five: After seventy-five, your needs totally change again. After seventy-five, the world goes away from you and you need to tune in to and communicate with, the higher reality, the world beyond this material world. When people over seventy-five fail to go beyond the material world, they feel negative, they complain and are critical of this world; they are meant to commune with the higher reality and this area remains unfulfilled.

This is a very brief explanation to understand our needs in life and how to differentiate between what we need and what we don't need.

Practice: Write down your SWAN

1. You have already written four lists: strengths, weaknesses, aims and needs.

You have categorized each list into physical, emotional and mental, and psychic if you feel inclined. If you haven't already done this, do it now!

2. You have matched up strengths and weaknesses, and can support your weaknesses with some of your strengths.

Again, if you haven't already done this, do it now. You can only do this practice with the lists in front of you. Select a weakness that's bothering you in life and then look at your list of strengths. Find one or two you can apply to help you to overcome the weakness.

3. Look at your list of aims and select the primary one. Look at which strength will help you achieve it. Also, look at which weakness will prevent you from achieving it. Which strengths can you apply to support those weaknesses? This way you can attain your ambitions.
4. What do you need to attain that aim? Look at the list of needs and work out if you have all you need to achieve the aim already. If not, how will you meet those needs?

5

SWAN Meditation: The Complete System

SWAN is a complete system to bring order into your life, to understand yourself and your life, and to attain your goals.

The subject is formidable, but putting your life, your personality in order, becoming the person you want to be, is a formidable task. If you look around you, you will see very few people who have done it, only the remarkable people, the high achievers. The rest have never done it.

You should also consider that if you are going to live this life, you should make the best of it. Why live for less?

SWAN as life map

You can do it; you can achieve what you want to achieve in life. However, you need a path, in the same way that you need a road map if you wanted to reach a destination. If you don't have a path or follow a map, you'll turn this way and that way and it may take years to reach that destination. The SWAN is a life map to help you reach your destination in this life – not the next one! You will reach your destination; you will be who you want to be. Start to develop the concept of your inner SWAN, your inner discrimination, which is based on the knowledge of these four aspects of yourself: strengths, weaknesses, aims and needs.

SWAN daily practice

To confirm your direction is correct, you need to contemplate it. Do the following meditation every day for ten minutes. This will help you understand your progress and confirm your direction, your aims, your needs. If you meditate on this every day, then your life will become very clear, and you will know with confidence how to overcome every difficulty.

Swan meditation: The full practice

Please sit comfortably. Remember, in meditation you should always be comfortable. Remove glasses if you are wearing them. Place your hands in a meditation mudra. Check that your spine, head, neck and shoulders are in one straight line. Close your eyes.

Bring the awareness inside. Become aware of your whole physical body from head to toe. Allow the body to relax into the posture. Focus on the physical body and relaxation. Feel that every muscle and part of the body is relaxed in the posture. Gradually, feel the whole body becoming calm and still. Feel very comfortable and at ease in the body.

Within the stillness of the body, become aware of the natural breath. Feel that the body is breathing and you are watching each breath in turn. The body breathes in and the body breathes out. Fix your attention on the flow of breath. Feel that the breath and the awareness flow together. You know each breath in turn from beginning to middle to end. You are aware of the body and aware of the breath.

Now, side by side with the awareness of the breath, begin to gaze into the space in front of your closed eyes. Look into the space, feeling very comfortable. This space is also a part of your existence. It is the vehicle of your consciousness.

Be aware of the breath, aware of the space, gazing into the space easily without expecting anything. Use the

awareness of the breath to support your meditation experience.

As you gaze into the space in front of the closed eyes, bring an aim to your mind. Do not struggle, do not think hard, just allow it to come of its own accord. Your aim is already there.

Place this aim right in the centre of the space in front of your closed eyes, and support this idea with your breath. Be aware of the breath, aware of the space, aware of the aim in the space in front of the closed eyes.

Place one, two or three strengths to the right side of the aim. Name them and place them to the right of the aim. Again, support this concept with your breath. Be aware of each breath.

Next place one, two or three weaknesses, the qualities that limit and block you from attaining your aim, to the left of the aim. Do not struggle, let them come. Your mind knows them. Again, the breath supports this concept. Breathe with the awareness.

See the aim in the centre, strengths to the right and weaknesses to the left. Find the strength to support each weakness. And place the strength to the side of the weaknesses. Again, don't make an effort. Let it happen. Continue to support the process with your breath. Become aware of the natural flow of the breath.

Now, gazing into the space in front of the closed eyes, see your aim in the middle, see it shining there. See your strengths to the right. Shine a light on them there.

See the weaknesses to the left. Shine a light on them there. See the strength to support each weakness.

See the needs; shine the light on what you need to achieve your aim. Place these needs below the aim. Write these needs below the aim. See what is written there.

At this point, try to see the whole concept: the aim in the centre, strengths to the right, weaknesses to the left, the strength to overcome each weakness, and the needs below. Just see the whole concept easily, without effort, as

it is. As you gaze at it, see it transforming into a beautiful white swan. See the white swan shine in the space.

Allow this vision of the swan to fade. Gazing into the space, begin to see a small, steady, brightly burning candle flame. Watching the flame, chant the mantra *Om* three times.

Now sit quietly for a few moments. Feel the effect of the meditation. Feel the power of the swan within you. It is the real power to be and to do whatever you have decided. Never forget that you have the power within you.

Now become aware of your physical body. Slowly move the fingers and toes. Slowly bend the head forward, to the back and rotate it sideways. Release the asana and open the eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat

SWAN meditation (hamsa dhyana) aims at developing awareness of our state of being by taking us through a process of observation and awareness of the deeper ahamkara (ego) aspects of life. The true nature of ego is living with absolute awareness of actions and reactions. It is the realization of the positive aspects of ego that is the purpose and aim of SWAN meditation.

—Swami Niranjanananda

6

Questions and Answers

Could you explain the difference between emotional and mental?

Emotions are a part of the mind. In yoga, it is said that the mind resides in the heart. The brain is a tool of the mind. The brain thinks and the heart feels. Emotions relate to the brain, and thoughts relate to the brain. If you are able to bring your awareness down to the heart, there would be very few thoughts, and you'll be able to experience more pure feeling. As long as your attention, your awareness is up in the head, you will have a lot of thoughts.

However, we also need to understand that every thought has a corresponding feeling and there's a feeling associated with every memory. Some memories make you feel happy and some make you feel sad. There are also very powerful feelings associated with dreams, and even daydreams. A nightmare is an extreme example; a nightmare is associated with very intense fear. If you wake up feeling terrible and trembling, that's a feeling. There are some dreams that are beautiful and you wake up feeling full of love and joy. Then you have to ask, "Well, where do the emotions come from? Do they come from the heart or from the brain? How do we understand this?" The mystery is solved when you add the psyche to the picture. The psyche is actually the subconscious mind. It's not the brain; it's a consciousness, the subconscious. The subconscious is the storehouse of all

the memories and associations that you hold, lifelong. They are all there, everything.

Remember, every memory is associated with particular feelings, right from your conception, every experience you have ever undergone. The feeling of that impression is held in your subconscious. Your subconscious holds a spectrum of every type of feeling possible for you. Every feeling that you have experienced or can experience is all there in your subconscious.

You might ask, “Where did the original feeling come from?” All the emotions are stored in the subconscious mind, but how did they get there? Where did they come from? The very first feeling, that original feeling is you. That belongs to your pure soul, your pure consciousness. Each one of us is also a pure consciousness. We are all beings of light. Our pure consciousness has entered a body and, as a result, along with the purity of our consciousness, it also carries the associations of the body and life in the body. Those are our impurities, those are our impure emotions.

Our impure emotions relate to our associations and experiences in the body. The impure emotions are the ones that we know, we remember and experience day-to-day. They are called impure for the reason that they relate to the body and experiences in the material world. We remember those. They are stored in our selves.

There are also pure emotions, which are the source of our being. That pure emotion is the expression and spirit of our soul and our pure consciousness. That is the source of our emotions. That one pure emotion is bliss. In yoga, we call that *ananda*, pure unalloyed bliss. From that bliss comes love. That first love is the love of all, it is the love of God, because our pure spirit is part of God. Since we know that bliss, we know that love deep inside ourselves, we are always looking for it. We are looking for it in everything and everybody. The problem is, we are looking in the wrong place. We can never find it outside. For that love, for that bliss, for that joy, we have to search inside ourselves.

The true self and pure self is the source of emotion. Then, that one pure emotion is reflected and becomes a part of all the different aspects of our being and we experience this in so many ways in our life.

When we talk about the mind and the emotions that we experience in life, those are evolutes of one pure emotion. Emotion is a very big subject. We know very little about it. In fact, many of our diseases and problems in life are emotional diseases. We try to cure these problems with medicine and we get more problems.

Is it possible to overcome emotional weaknesses with mental strengths? Or can only emotional strengths overcome emotional weaknesses?

You have to figure out which strength you feel will work to support that weak emotional area. The mind is very important because it is the mind that can understand. You need to use the mind to identify the weakness to start with. You need to use the mind to understand when the weakness is limiting you. Emotions are just feelings, but the mind is able to identify the awareness of any aspect of the personality. Mind and feelings work together, always. We separated them so that we could understand; however, the fact is that they work together. Thoughts always accompany feelings, feelings always accompany a thought or a memory. They work together. You can use one or the other, and you should.

You can even use a physical strength to help you to deal with emotion. You have to look at the whole picture to see how you can strengthen it with what you have. You might have some assets and deposits at different places and you can draw them out to pay off debts.

Generally speaking, you look at the weakness and you try to think of its opposite. Suppose I have a lot of hatred, what would be the best way to deal with that? Yoga says to try to develop the opposite quality. If I have hatred, I should try to develop or express love. Therefore, in defining your weaknesses and supporting them, find an opposite strength.

What should I do if I cannot find strengths to overcome my weaknesses?

Everybody has strength. Even a worm has a certain strength. It is not that you do not have it, but you have not looked. Even the worst drunkard and debauchee has positive qualities. You have to find those. You're not a drunkard and you're not a debauchee. You have positive qualities, you just haven't looked yet. You know that jewels are hidden deep in the earth and you too have jewels lying deep within you; you have strength. If you're not able to see them immediately, they are deep within, but you have them. You may have many; you have to bring those up to the surface and identify them.

Strengths are the most difficult to work with because we do not see them. We do not know our own strength, and many times we need to be told. "You are strong in this and this and this," and you say, "Really? I didn't know that." What you need to do is sit with your husband, your wife, your family, your kids, your friends and just say, "Can you tell me what positives you see in me? What am I strong in? How do I seem to you?" Then you learn a lot about yourself that you don't see. You can't see your strength in the mirror, you see only the flaws.

Every person should know that they have positive, wonderful qualities. Why? You are a being of light. How can you be anything but strong and brilliant and full of good qualities? The world and the body have covered them over and made us forget.

My intuition is strong. This often works positively but also sensitively responds to others' ill-will and negative energy, and that makes me exhausted. What should I do when the same characteristic, intuition, could be both a strength and a weakness?

It's difficult when you feel that your positive qualities are being influenced by the negativity of other people. The problem is that the ordinary person who might be very

psychic, doesn't understand much about it and has not had the training or developed the skills to deal with it.

We are all psychic. Some people are more psychic than others. The questioner is very intuitive, so he is probably naturally working at the psychic level. We generally think that to be psychic is a strength. However, functioning at the psychic level also makes a person very vulnerable and sensitive if they don't know how to handle it. The type of training that we receive in life and in the world does not prepare us for this. It prepares us for the material reality, it doesn't strengthen us to deal with the psychic reality. This is a classic example of how a strength can become a weakness. What should you do? You need to constantly stay grounded.

Can you tell me ways to become grounded?

You need to do activities that make you fixed on the earth, on the ground, in the world. You also need to relate with people who are grounded. The most important practice is karma yoga. Practise karma yoga, meditation in action. You might think that if you do a lot of meditation, sitting quietly alone in a room, it will help you, but it won't. It will make you more vulnerable. You need to do physical things, outside things. Be with people who are more physical, though this may not appeal to you. This is how you have to manage it. The psychic mind is already strong, and it's too strong to live in the world. You need to ground yourself every day. Do asana, do pranayama, do physical sports, be with physical people, climb a mountain, walk a dog. Don't spend a lot of time alone. Then you'll get stronger and be able to balance this inner and outer. It's a difficult thing. The psychic won't go away, you will just be able to live on both levels.

Regarding the well story, how can I trust my intuition to tell me which hole is the real well?

This refers to the story mentioned earlier about the man digging many wells and never reaching water. We use this

story to illustrate that we shouldn't have too many aims or ambitions; we should try to prioritize and have just one or two main aims. How do I know the aim that I have chosen as my main aim is my true main aim and that I can achieve it?

I know an aim is my true main aim because that's what I want to do and be. I have thought about it and I've decided that I can do it and I will do it. That's how I know. It is similar to the way you decide to build a house; how do you start such a huge project? You build a house level by level. In the same manner, if you decide this is your aim, then slowly, year by year, you go about achieving that, becoming that or doing that. If you don't have too many aims, you can apply all your attention, all your energy toward one and you will achieve it. If halfway along you decide, 'Oh, it's too difficult. I can't do it', and try another one, and halfway along again, you try another one, you'll get nothing at the end of your life. If you stick to one thing, you will reach it.

Could I do the SWAN meditation on a train? Please advise me on how to do this meditation in my daily life.

Yes, you can do it on a train, especially when you have time to think the different things through and write them down. If you're on a train for a long time, especially in the morning when your mind is clear, do it. Close your eyes; do the meditation practice. The best time to do SWAN would be after the morning yoga practice, if you have a personal practice. You would do a few asanas and pranayama in the morning, then after that do the SWAN for ten minutes. Don't wait until the evening, when you're tired. Do it on the weekends, too.

How do I prioritize my ambitions?

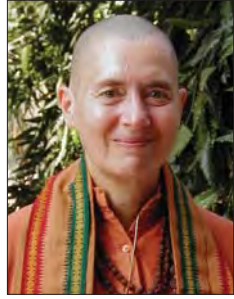
The first criterion is that it is something you want to do. You feel attracted to it: every part of you wants to be that, every part of you wants to do that. It isn't socially motivated or parentally motivated. Try to discern the difference; often

we aspire to do what our parents want us to do, or what society says is a good thing to do. That might not work in the long term. Every person is born with a purpose, to become and to do something unique to them. Your heart knows what that is, and your heart would never lie to you. Try to find that aim and ambition for yourself in your heart and you'll know if it's the right one. Don't be in a hurry. You should write down everything you can think of, and then slowly cross out a few, and cross out a few more. Take your time. Don't rush. Ultimately, you'll reach five. From the five, take away two, then you have your top three. Start working on those.

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Swami Satyadharma was born in 1946. During the years 1965–1975, she travelled extensively throughout the world in search of her spiritual path. In 1975, she was initiated into poorna sannyasa by her guru Swami Satyananda Saraswati, and remained in India as a sannyasin disciple under his guidance.

From 1976 to 1994 she compiled and edited Yoga magazine and many major yoga publications. From 1995 to 2005, she assisted with the establishment of Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university. During this period she directed the Department of Undergraduate Studies and served as a member on the Yoga Education Council.

Swami Satyadharma is currently based in Australia and travels internationally, conducting lectures and seminars, and assisting in the development of Satyananda Yoga worldwide.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

SWAN meditation is an important method evolved by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati to help us discover our personality and improve its expression in everyday life.

SWAN is an acronym for the four principles that influence our personality and direction in life: S – strengths, W – weaknesses, A – ambitions, and N – needs. In each of us certain strengths and weaknesses are predominant, and they either help or hinder us in whatever we think or do.

Throughout life, we must also work to attain our aspirations and needs. The expression of these four qualities makes us what we are. By understanding their unique expression in our life, a creative, dynamic and clear mind results.

